

# Professional Development Guidelines

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## *Effective Practices*

The Professional Development Guidelines are intended to assist districts in planning, implementing, and assessing their professional development programming. As these Guidelines are used, there are factors which need to be addressed within the overall school improvement process to assure that the endeavor is successful.

The implementation of a major change may be dependent upon effective professional development. Preparatory stages should include examination of the present atmosphere and structures within the school. A positive school climate is vital to the acceptance of, participation in, and implementation of new ideas. Addressing the needs of learners – personal wellness and the ability of their present circumstances to accommodate change are also vital. The needs and goals of parents and the community at large need to be examined. It may be necessary to conduct activities to foster consensus building, trust, and motivation prior to undertaking the focused efforts.

Student benefit should guide all professional development efforts. As school mission, vision, and goals are set, the question should always be asked, How will this action positively impact students?

Effective two-way communication will enhance the preliminary and focused professional development activities. All partners in the professional development planning, delivery, and follow-up need to be able to communicate clearly and freely. They need to know that their role is valued.

Available human and material resources need to be coordinated to assure that effective professional development happens. In a world of limited time and financial resources, it is vital to foster collaboration and creative planning whenever possible to assure that professional development is kept as a priority. It is important to recognize this priority as the impetus for nearly all education improvement efforts.

It is important for professionals to realize that learning is a lifelong process. If we are to meet the needs of students, who will live in our future, we must continuously improve and update what and how we teach them. Professional educators must model the concept of lifelong learning.

The following guidelines are presented to assist schools and communities as plans are set for the continuing professional development of educators. The guidelines are numbered and lettered only as a point of reference, not to indicate priority. All are equally important components.

**I. Effective professional development responds to identified vision, mission, and goals by:**

- A. promoting high student achievement.
- B. aligning student, educator, and school vision, mission, and goals while being sensitive to individual needs.
- C. promoting cumulative movement toward a long-term vision for the future.
- D. recognizing the inter-related complexity of teaching and learning.

**II. Effective professional development is a sustained, continuous process, which forms a cycle by:**

- A. assessing needs in light of vision, mission, and goals,
- B. undertaking purposeful planning,
- C. providing learning opportunities that address knowledge, skills, and attitudes,
- D. providing time and opportunity to apply what has been learned,
- E. providing follow-up support,
- F. gathering assessment data of results through instruments aligned with the original purpose of the program, and
- G. using assessment data for evaluative feedback into the planning process.

**III. Effective professional development is a process which promotes participation by:**

- A. involving all partners in the process from the beginning.
- B. seeking, valuing, and using participant input.
- C. establishing a representative steering committee.
- D. using clear, two-way communication.

**IV. Effective professional development uses valid research and proven theory by:**

- A. identifying and incorporating current research and theory relevant to the targeted area.
- B. incorporating challenging content standards.
- C. enlisting instructors who are knowledgeable of the research and theory in their area.
- D. ensuring that resources and consultants are from credible organizations.
- E. clearly linking practice to research and theory.

**V. Effective professional development is learner-centered and focuses on the participant(s) by:**

- A. recognizing individual goals.
- B. being relevant to the needs of the learners.
- C. encouraging and empowering personal responsibility.
- D. considering the physical and emotional needs of the learners.
- E. being responsive to career stages.

**VI. Effective professional development demonstrates effective teaching strategies for transference into the classroom by:**

- A. addressing a variety of learning styles.
- B. providing for the needs of all students.
- C. using a variety of assessments.
- D. responding to student feedback.
- E. modeling practical, appropriate teaching techniques.
- F. promoting the use of human and material resources to broaden student learning.
- G. using and encouraging the application of the most advanced and appropriate technologies.

**VII. Effective professional development incorporates coaching and/or mentoring support by:**

- A. identifying appropriate individuals to be trained in coaching/mentoring skills.
- B. outlining a systematic plan for regular contact and two-way communication.
- C. encouraging formal and informal interaction and sharing among participants.
- D. recognizing mentoring/coaching is a positive growth process apart from formal evaluation.

**VIII. Effective professional development includes assessment mechanisms for feedback by:**

- A. documenting the process and content.
- B. including an evaluation of student learning.
- C. recording changes in participant practices.
- D. using evaluations, of the program and of student learning, for future planning and ongoing improvement.
- E. sharing evaluation results with all partners and participants.
- F. comparing results to the previously set goals.

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## *Effective Practices*

The *Professional Development Guidelines: Effective Practices* were developed through the collaborative work of over 200 educators and community members across the state of North Dakota over a two year period and the draft reviewed in a mailing to over 1250 persons. The process began by gathering information on grassroots needs and preferences and continued with the infusion of information on proven research in the field of professional development across the nation, in order to give the *Guidelines* a sound foundation with a uniquely North Dakota focus.

The *Guidelines* represent a summation of best practices for effective use of professional development as a tool to drive the continuous improvement of education for students. The *Guidelines* were developed as part of a larger grant project to provide local schools with information on effective professional development practices as they move through their strategic planning processes, and also to serve as a tool for planning and assessing the potential effectiveness of professional development opportunities.

In addition to the guidelines document, two video tapes featuring a cross section of approximately 25 schools across the state were produced to illustrate the main concepts. The videos and additional training materials on professional development were placed at each of the regional Teacher Learning Centers for ongoing use by local schools.

This project was coordinated by the Education Standards and Practices Board in collaboration with the North Dakota Teacher Center Network and Valley City Public Schools, as well as many education and community groups, and was funded through a sub-grant of the North Dakota Goals 2000: Educate America Act.

For additional information on the *Professional Development Guidelines: Effective Practices* project, contact:

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